

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

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INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

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AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

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E.O. 11652 N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MV

SUBJ: WHY WAS MALDIVIAN PRIME MINISTER REMOVED?

RER: COLOMBO 0720

1. SUMMARY. WE BELIVE MALDIVIAN PRESIDENT ZAKI WAS REMOVED FROM OFFICE PRIMARILY BECAUSE PRESIDENT NASIR FELT CHALLENGED BY ZAKI'S APPARENT POPULARITY AND EXPANDING INFLUENCE AND WAS NOT PARTICULARLY HAPPY ABOUT ZAKI'S INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY DURING PAST YEAR. SOME CEYLONESE SEE AN INDIAN HAND IN REMOVAL BUT THIS IS NOT SUPPORTED BY INDEPENDENT EVIDENCE. EXCEPT FOR ZAKI, ALL OTHER MEMBERS OF MALDIVAN CABINET REMAIN IN OFFICE AND THERE IS SPECULATON FINANCE MINISTER SATTAR MAY BE NAMED VICE PRESIDENT. MALDIVIAN AMB IN COLOMBO HAS ASSURED EMBASSY THAT GOM FOREIGN POLICY REMAINS UNCHANGED AND THERE IS NO INDICATION TO DATE THAT GOM LIKELY GRANT ANY NEW SPECIAL POSITION OR PRIVILEGE TO OTHER OUTSIDE POWERS. END SUMMARY.

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2. BEST AVAILABLE INFO INDICATES THAT MALDIVIAN PRIME MINISTER ZAKI WAS REMOVED BY PRESIDENT NASIR THIS MONTH BECAUSE ZAKI SEEMED TO BE BECOMING TOO POPULAR AND INFLUENTIAL AND NASIR DECIDED TO CUT HIM DOWN BEFORE HE POSED DIRECT THREAT TO NASIR AND NASIR'S ASSOCIATE, BUSINESS MAGNATE ALI MANIKU. THIS CONCLUSION BASED ON EMBASSY'S INDEPENDENT ANALYSIS, SUPPLEMENTED BY RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH UK HIGH COMMISSIONER SMEDLEY AND OTHER COLOMBO-BASED DIPLOMATS, WITH TISSA WIJEYERATNE, ADDITIONAL SECRETARY IN MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AND WITH AIR VICE MARSHALL PADDY MENDIS WHO HAS CLOSE TIES WITH MALDIVES.

3. NASIR WAS GIVEN GRAPHIC DEMONSTRATION OF ZAKI'S POPULARITY AND AMBITIONS WHEN MALDIVIAN 54-MEMBER MAJLIS LAST MONTH RENOMINATED HIM BY OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF 38 VOTES AND WHEN ZAKI ASSUMED MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO WHICH HAD BEEN VACANT SINCE AUGUST 1972. A TACITURN, INWARD LOOKING MAN WHO SPEAKS NO ENGLISH, NASIR PROBABLY LOOKED ON WITH SOME DISPLEASURE AND POSSIBLE JEALOUSY AS HIS OUTGOING AND REMARKABLY URBANE PRIME MINISTER TRIPPED OFF TO COLOMBO, NEW DELHI, AND LONDON, HOBNOBBED WITH PRIME MINISTERS BANDARANAIKE AND GANDHI, AND HAD AUDIENCE WITH QUEEN. (HE PLANNED VISIT PAKISTAN IN APRIL.) THERE IS ALSO SPECULATION THAT NASIR AND HIS CLOSE CONFIDANT, BUSINESS MAGNATE ALI MANIKU, WERE BEING PRESSED BY ZAKI TO DIVERT SOME OF THEIR PRIVATE EARNINGS FROM TOURISM AND SHIPPING INTO MALDIVIAN TREASURY RATHER THAN INTO THEIR PRIVATE POCKETS AND ALLEGED SWISS BANK ACCOUNTS.

4. SOME CEYLONESE, INCLUDING ADDITIONAL SECRETARY WIJEYERATNE, BLAME ZAKI'S DOWNFALL ON HIS DESIRE TO MAINTAIN RELATIVELY BALANCED NON-ALIGNED FOREIGN POLICY WHILE NASIR AND ALI MANIKU WANTED TO ORIENT GOM'S POLICY MORE TOWARD INDIA. ACCORDING WIJEYERATNE, MANIKU STILL HOLDS GRIEVANCE AGAINST GSL BECAUSE IT TEMPORARILY CHARGED HIM WITH CURRENCY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SMUGGLING IN SUMMER 1973. ZAKI, ON OTHER HAND, IS SAID TO HAVE RESISTED INDIAN PROPOSAL TO SUBSTITUTE INDIAN FOR CEYLONESE TEACHERS IN MALE, TO ROUTE INCREASING VOLUME TOURISTS TO MALDIVES VIA INDIA, AND TO TIE IN MALDIVIAN SHIPPING MORE CLOSELY WITH INDIAN PORTS, PARTICULARLY BOMBAY. THIS THESIS OF "INDIAN HIDDEN HAND" IS NOT GENERALLY SUPPORTED BY MORE DETACHED COLOMBO OBSERVERS. FURTHERMORE,

DESPITE ALLEGATIONS, THERE IS NO FIRM EVIDENCE THAT ZAKI HAS PERSONALLY PROFITED BY SMUGGLING LUXURY GOODS FROM MALDIVES INTO SRI LANKA AND INDIA.

5. UK HIGH COMMISSIONER SMEDLEY, WHO HAS RETURNED AFTER SHORT VISIT TO MALE, SAID MALDIVIAN CPITAL APPEARED QUITE AND NORMAL. HOWEVER, HE DID OVSERVE FOR FIRST TIME THAT GUARDS AT PRESIDENT'S HOUSE WERE ARMED WITH SUBMACHINE GUNS AND THAT MALE'S ONLY PUBLIC PARK HAD BEEN CLOSED, PRESUMABLY TO DENY PLACE FOR POSSIBLE PUBLIC GATHERING. SMEDLEY ALSO SAID THAT, IN APPARENT MOVE TO CURRY POPULAR FAVOR, NASIR HAS REDUCED PRICE OF RICE BY 40 PERCENT AND HAS REMOVED NOMINAL TAXES ON BOATS AND HAND CARTS. ALTHOUGH SRI LANKA PRESS HAS REPORTED THAT 35 PERSONS ARE UNDER SOME FORM OF ARREST IN ADDITION TO ZAKI AND FORMER PROTOCOL CHIEF AHMED JALEEL, NO NAMES OF OTHERS HAVE BEEN GIVEN. SPECULATION IS THAT IF ARREST FIGURE IS ACCURATE, THOSE ARRESTED MAY BE MID-LEVEL MALDIVIAN OFFICIALS WHO WERE CONSIDERED CLOSE TO DEPOSED PRIME MINISTER.

6. WITH EXCEPTION ZAKI, MALDIVIAN CABINET REMAINS UNCHANGED AND SMEDLEY REPORTS THAT DURING HIS CONVERSATIONS RE GAN (BEING REPORTED SEPTEL), GOM'S SIDE WAS REPRESENTED BY FINANCE MINISTER ABDUL SATTAR (FORMER AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON), FISHERIES MINISTER AHAMED HILMEY DIDI AND ATTORNEY GENERAL IBRAHIM SHIHAB. WHEN SMEDLEY, DURING BRIEF AND RELATIVELY NON-SUBSTANTIVE INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDNET NASIR, ASKED HIM CAUSE OF RECENT GOVERNMENTAL CHANGES, NASIR'S ONLY REPLY THROUGH INTERPRETER (SATTAR) WAS THAT FROM SOME TIME CONSIDERATION HAD BEEN GIVEN TO ABOLISHING OFFICE OF PRIME LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MINISTER. (IF THIS WERE CAUSE, QUESTION REMAINS WHY NASIR PERMITTED FEBRUARY MAJLIS ELECTION.) GENERAL BELIEF IS THAT ALTHOUGH NASIR HAS ONLY ONE KIDNEY AND HAS BEEN AILING FOR SOME TIME, HE IS LIKELY TO RETAIN POWER INHERENT IN MALDIVAN PRESIDENCY AND RICH PERSONAL RETURNS THROUGH SHIPPING AND TOURIMS. THERE IS SPECULATION, HOWEVER, THAT SATTAR MAY BE NAMED VICE PRESIDENT TO RELIEVE PRESIDENT OF DIRECT BURDEN OF ADMINISTERING GOM BUREAUCRACY.

7. MALDIVIAN AMB DIDI HAS ASSURED AMB THAT THERE WOULD BE NO CHANGE IN MALDIVIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THAT GOM WILL CONTINUE TO BE "FRIENDS TO ALL," BUT IT IS PREMATURE TO JUDGE WHETHER THIS WILL

BE THE CASE. IT DOES SEEM LIKELY THAT MALDIVES
WILL BECOME MORE INWARD LOOKING COUNTRY IN IMMEDIATE
FUTURE THAN WAS CASE UNDER ZAKI. ON BASIS CONVERSA-
TIONS WITH DIPLOMATS IN COLOMBO, NONE OF COUNTRIES
MOST DIRECTLY INTERESTED (SRI LANKA, INDIA, PAKISTAN,
AND USSR), APPEAR PLEASED WITH DEPARTURE OF ZAKI
WHO WAS OPEN, WARM-HEARTED INDIVIDUAL WHO ENJOYED
PLAYING "THE BIG GAN" MALDIVIAN STYLE. THERE IS
NO EVIDENCE MALDIVIAN GOVERNMENT IS LIKELY TO GRANT
SPECIAL POSITION OR PREFERENCES TO ANY OUTSIDE POWER,
INCLUDING TURNING OVER GAN TO ANOTHER COUNTRY
FOLLOWING BRITISH WITHDRAWAL. THIS ASSESSMENT, HOW-
EVER, IS PRELIMINARY AND WILL BE SUBJECT TO EMBASSY'S
CONTINUING REVIEW.
VAN HOLLEN

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